

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD) spoke on the House Floor today in support of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which will expand the program to include more than 11 million children nationwide. Maryland currently has 132,887 enrolled in the program. Maryland's FY2009 allotment under the bill will increase 162 percent from \$70.2 million to \$184.2 million. (Numbers on the number of new children expected to be added to the program under this bill will be available tomorrow.) Among other improvements, the bill ensures that quality dental coverage will now be provided to all children enrolled in SCHIP. [Bill text and summary](#)

[Video of Congressman Hoyer's floor statement can be viewed here](#)

Below are remarks as prepared for delivery:

"I want you to hear the story of Deamonte Driver.

"This is from the *Washington Post*, on February 28, 2007: 'Twelve-year-old Deamonte Driver died of a toothache Sunday. A routine, \$80 tooth extraction might have saved him....[But] by the time Deamonte's own aching tooth got any attention, the bacteria from the abscess had spread to his brain, doctors said. After two operations and more than six weeks of hospital care, the Prince George's County boy died.'

"If you want a picture of American healthcare, in all its excellence and squalor, there it is: The best doctors, the latest technology, six weeks of hospital care for a sick boy, at a cost of \$250,000-in a country that can't find \$80 to fix a toothache. To paraphrase Adlai Stevenson, American healthcare swallows tigers whole-but it can choke to death on a gnat. We couldn't find \$80, and in the end it cost us a quarter-million-and one precious life. A system that makes such errors on a regular basis is both financially foolhardy and morally insupportable.

"Yes, on a regular basis. Deamonte Driver's case may have been extreme, but it was hardly unique. Every day, uninsured parents are forgoing much cheaper preventive care and using the ER as the first line of defense for their children's health. And we are all paying for it. We are subsidizing those ER visits; we are dealing with overburdened hospitals; and we are creating a sicker, less productive workforce.

“Fixing American healthcare will take much longer than an afternoon. But if I could pass just one bill today, if I could find the most efficient use of our healthcare dollars, I would insure more children. There is no more medically pivotal time in life: Make it through childhood without checkups, without a doctor's care, and you are still facing a lifetime of endangered health. Every other developed nation in the world seems to get that! Every other developed nation in the world makes sure all of its children are covered-except for the United States.

“This bill brings into the State Children's Health Insurance Program 4 million children who are eligible but not yet enrolled. It does what President Bush promised to do when he ran for re-election in 2004. Accepting the Republican nomination in 2004, he said, ‘In a new term, we will lead an aggressive effort to enroll millions of poor children who are eligible but not signed up for government health insurance programs.’ That's what the House and Senate have been pushing to do, and what the overwhelming majority of Americans have wanted us to do, for years. Mr. Speaker, we've tried. President Bush broke his promise and vetoed similar bills twice. But we are confident that President-elect Obama sees the issue differently.

“This bill also gives states permission to waive an arbitrary waiting period of five years to enroll immigrant children who are here legally. It doesn't make moral sense to deny those children health services, when their parents already pay payroll taxes. It doesn't make public health sense to keep those kids from getting the basic care we all need. And it doesn't make economic sense to subsidize unnecessary ER visits.

“Mr. Speaker, we all know that we are in a severe recession-and it makes this bill more vital now than ever. More and more Americans are out of work; more and more family budgets are strained to the breaking point. Today, health coverage for kids could make the difference between a family's economic ruin and economic stability. As Yale University's Jacob S. Hacker writes, access to affordable health care could be ‘an immediate...lifeline for working families.’

“It is in our power to throw that lifeline today. I urge my colleagues to make the right choice.”

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